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ABSTRACT

Preparing for retirement can sometimes be problematic since it means that one is aging and moving into another life cycle change. This paper will review some factors to consider in making the transition a more positive experience. The impact of retirement on older citizens is frequently neglected in the counseling arena. In the current youth oriented society it is hard to get people to discuss the need for providing counseling services for the millions of people who are considering retirement. A pre-retirement counselor needs to know counseling plus understand what a retiree will face in retirement. The current economic trend is to retire older employees early instead of letting them phase into retirement. The financial incentives to retire at or before 65 are found in Social Security and pension plans. Limited counseling is given to retirees by most employers and is usually only about pensions. The trend now for many firms is to downsize, eliminate retirement plans and put the burden on the employee to make their own financial retirement decisions. All other aspects of retirement are up to the individual. With retirement being more accepted in the last 15-20 years there is more information and people available for guidance. The elderly have now become a political force and are pushing for better medical and financial treatment in retirement. Contains 17 references. (BF)

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Retirement counseling:

Preparing for the "Golden Years"

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Abstract

Preparing for retirement is admitting that you are aging and are moving into another life cycle change. This paper will review some factors to consider in making the transition a more positive experience.

Retirement counseling: Preparing for the "Golden Years"

The impact of retirement on older citizens is frequently neglected in the counseling arena. In our current youth oriented society it is hard to get people to discuss the need for providing "planning, education, or counseling services" for the millions of people who are retiring or considering retirement (Dennis, 1984). The retirement phase of life for some may last for "more than 30 years" and people should make solid preparations to enjoy this time of their lives (Coni, 1992).

Retirement: A Time for Freedom

According to (Coni, 1992) the plus 65 population in the US in 1989 was over 27 million. By 2000 there will be 35 million people over 65 years old, of which 4.5 million will be over 85 years old. The 15 percent or so elderly is too many people to have "live a parasitic existence" (Coni, 1992). Successful aging and planning for retirement requires that "conformity - following guidelines expected" be put aside (Jones, 1988). Expectations placed upon us prior to retirement come from school, religion, parents, employers and society. Future retirees need to asses what they have done with their life to date and what they want to change for the future.

Planning seems appropriate for retirees to accomplish what they want in retirement. Retirement may bring family closeness and increase or decrease stress. It is a time to "re-negotiate

tasks and responsibilities" (Coni, 1992). Coni then goes on to give more valuable information on the physical, mental and sociological aspects of aging. For psychological health Coni recommends an adequate standard of living, financial and emotional security, exercise, social interaction and pursuing personal interests.

Raising the mandatory retirement from 65 to 70 in 1978 (Henretta, 1992) has given people 5 more years to consider options in retirement. Family considerations have a role in the timing of retirement because of marital status and children. Some of the factors to consider are age of wife and children. If the wife is younger or if there are children under 21 still at home, the decision for the man to retire may be delayed. The reasons for retirement are "distinctive and overlapping" and complex (Henretta, 1992).

Planning retirement should be a life long process. Health and finances will have a great impact on the quality of retirement. The anticipation phase may start at least 15 before retirement since it has become "legitimate" (Evans, 1985). More people are now seeking information about retirement. They are also talking with family, relatives, friends and co-workers about financial plans for retirement. Proximity to retirement increased the "retirement-oriented activities" (Evans, 1985).

Planned retirement allows preparation where unplanned or forced retirement can be unsettling. Those with better economic levels reported better health and consequences in retirement but it had little impact on attitudes (Fillenbaum, 1985). For women however, the stress is frequently economic since they are "financially disadvantaged relative to men" (Logue, 1991). If women are already stressed in their late 60's their economic well being probably will not

improve. Because they live longer they will have more medical costs because of aging. Many women work past retirement to keep from "falling into poverty" (Logue, 1991).

To manage stress risks, Dennis recommends using communication, exercise, nutrition and deep relaxation. A good health plan that meets the needs of the retiree should be included in retirement planning. Often overlooked is leisure planning since it is not the presenting problem or acute. Leisure should be addressed because it "continues indefinitely" (Dennis, 1984).

Planning for retirement income is one of the most important topics for pre-retirement planning and counseling. Of the third of the retirees having difficulties retiring, 40 percent have problems with "reduced income", 28 percent have health problems, 22 percent miss their job and 10 percent have death of a spouse (Atchley, 1976). With increasing inflation the last 17 years, the pressure is even more intense on proper financial planning. Counselor should be aware of the multiple areas the retiree must address in preparing for retirement.

The baby boom generation may enter into retirement in better financial position because they have deferred marriage and reduced childbearing (Easterlin, 1990). If people plan on social security as their only source of income at retirement they may have difficulties. When social security started in the 1930s' there were about 14 contributors for each retiree. Now there are about 3-4 contributors per retiree according to social security literature. This will mean that in retirement there will also be "fewer (or no) children to provide companionship and support" for the elderly (Easterlin, 1990).

The professional workers are in a "particularly advantageous position" (Kilty, 1986) when financially planning for retirement. They have options of pensions, continued employment or

second careers not available to lower income workers. Income was the most consistent variable. Women are at a disadvantage with current income "about 73% of those for men" (Kilty, 1986). The professionals have the advantage of planning for early retirement while making plans for possible second careers. This indicates that plans must be made for after retirement (Kilty, 1985).

Adjusting to the loss of work affects social and psychological aspects of life. Satisfaction to retirement was not so much the loss of the work role but "lower income, poor health and negative attitude toward retirement" (Beck, 1982). Other factors such as occupation status, education or race did not have any significant effects on retirement adjustment. Men who retired earlier than they expected were significantly less happy (Beck, 1982).

The changes after retirement with a vigorous exercise program helped Type A behavior to decrease "depression and hostility" (Howard, 1986). After 3-4 years the person may become disenchanted when they must cope with inadequate income, loss of friends and possible poor health. The influence on depression improved in both Type A and Type B over the one year test (Howard, 1986).

Retirement requires that 40-60 hours need to be taken up by other activities to replace employment. These can be exercise, leisure, study, adding new friends, travel, or volunteer activities. This new stable phase will work when the retiree has established a "predictable and satisfying routine" (Ekerdt, 1985). Proper planning with a "future orientation" will help the retiree after a possible letdown at about 18 months (Ekerdt, 1985).

Coping with change needs to be addressed since the retiree may need to adjust to many losses such as: loved ones, health, job, physical appearance, hearing, eyesight, status, mobility,

reduced income and value in society. Sixty-five does not mean immediate change from a healthy middle age to "decrepitude" (Ferrini, 1986). The myths about elderly and aging indicate a need to dispel the "stereotypes about elders" and look at their needs in planning for the future (Ferrini, 1986).

There are only two immediate adjustments at retirement and they are "loss of job and loss of income" (Atchley, 1976). The other changes will happen over time. Very little is done for the average worker in a retirement ceremony since those handling the event have few ideas of the positive side of retirement. The retirement ceremony is usually an emphasis on separation and very little about the future (Atchley, 1976).

Discussion with a spouse about retirement is an indicator that a worker is in the pre-retirement phase. These talks are "different for women and men" (Richardson, 1993). Women will talk about life-styles and men will be concerned about health, timing and where to retire. A counselor must get the "specifics of their problem" (Herr, 1979) so that they can work toward a solution. Setting goals is as important as defining the problem. Once the goal has been reached the time is ready to assess if more counseling is needed. The goals should be realistic and achievable. Looking at the goals of the retiree may determine if the family needs counseling. Family counseling depends on the circumstance of each retiree and how they are processing retirement. The crisis comes when the mature adult is unable to cope with events or feels helpless (Herr, 1979).

Pre-retirement is a mid-life issue and grief therapy may be needed to prepare the retiree for loss. Workers should be encouraged to share their feelings about "growing older" (Richardson,

1993). According to Richardson, all pre-retirement will include listening, assessment and an intervention. Once a date is set for retirement the client should prepare by practicing hobbies, taking longer vacations, spend more time away from work, join new groups, and try new leisure activities. Few workers ever attend a pre-retirement planning session because they are committed to their work and associate retirement with death and old age (Richardson, 1993).

The transition to the retirement cycle or phase in life is a very difficult time. The pre-retirement process can be a time consuming challenge to prepare financially and mentally for a new future. Now it is easier for people to admit they are aging or getting ready for retirement. However, a retiree must admit he/she has a problem before they will seek help.

Conclusion

A pre-retirement counselor needs to know counseling plus understand what a retiree will face in retirement. The current economic trend is to early retire older employees instead of letting them phase into retirement. The financial incentives to retire at or before 65 are found in Social Security and pension plans. Limited counseling is given to retirees by most employers and is usually only about pensions. The trend now for many firms to downsize, eliminate retirement plans and put the burden on the employee to make their own financial retirement decisions. All other aspects of retirement are up to the individual. With retirement being more accepted in the last 15-20 years there is more information and people available for guidance. The elderly have now become a political force and are pushing for better medical and financial treatment in retirement.

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